

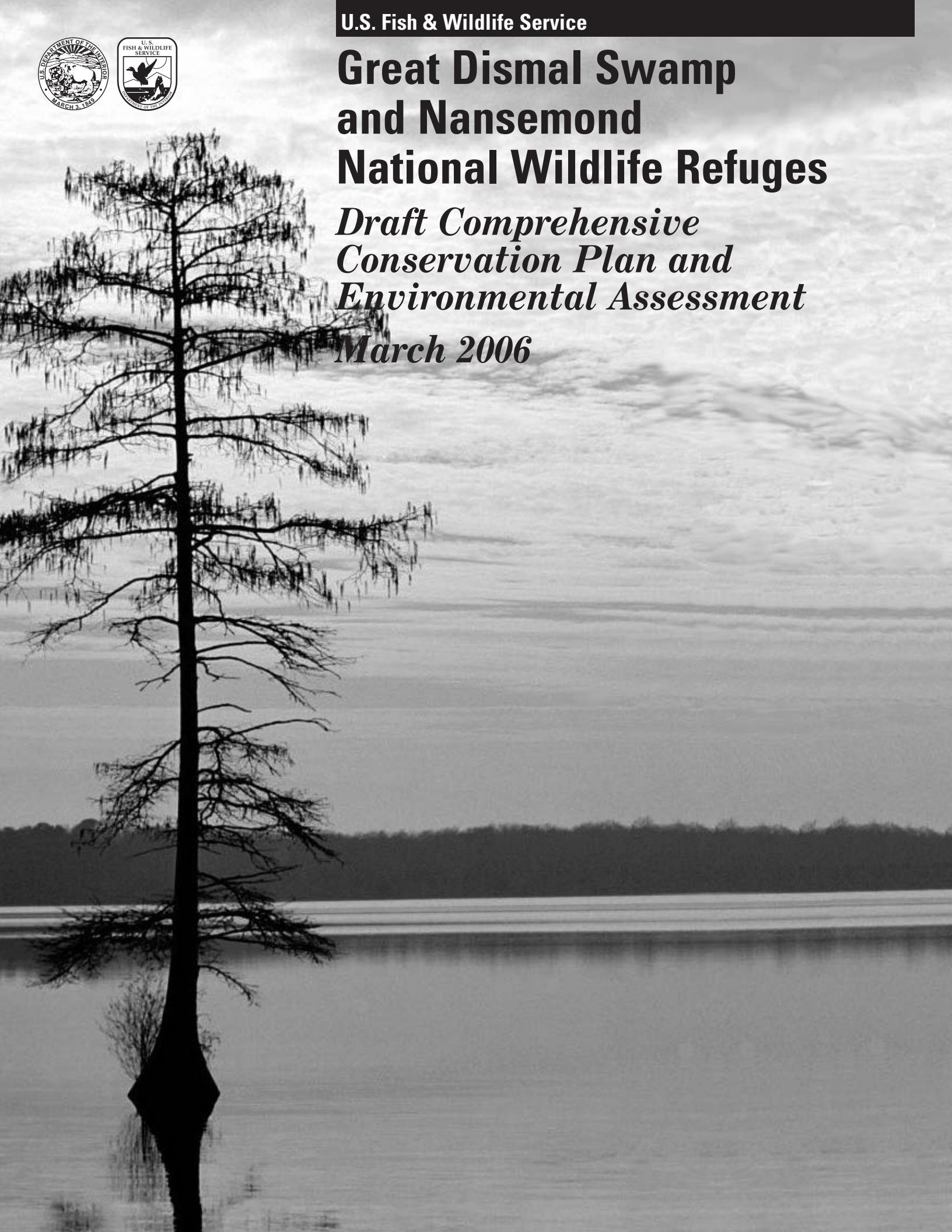


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Dismal Swamp and Nansemond National Wildlife Refuges

*Draft Comprehensive
Conservation Plan and
Environmental Assessment*

March 2006





This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 96-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of 544 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas. It also operates 65 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid Program which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

Comprehensive Conservation Plans provide long-term guidance for management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and identify the Service's best estimate of future needs. These plans detail program planning levels that are sometimes substantially above current budget allocations and, as such, are primarily for Service strategic planning and program prioritization purposes. The plans do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.



Guiding Principles of the National Wildlife Refuge System

We are land stewards, guided by Aldo Leopold's teachings that land is a community of life and that love and respect for the land is an extension of ethics. We seek to reflect that land ethic in our stewardship and to instill it in others.

Wildlands and the perpetuation of diverse and abundant wildlife are essential to the quality of the American life.

We are public servants. We owe our employers, the American people, hard work, integrity, fairness, and a voice in the protection of their trust resources.

Management strategies from preservation to active manipulation of habitats and populations is necessary to achieve the missions of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Wildlife-dependent uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when compatible, are legitimate and appropriate uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Partnerships with those who want to help us meet our mission are welcome and indeed essential.

Employees are our most valuable resource. They are to be respected. They deserve empowering and mentoring, and support through a caring work environment.

We respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of our neighbors.



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Readers Guide

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) planning process for all national wildlife refuges involves generally two levels of planning: 1) the development of a broad Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP); and, 2) the formulation of more detailed step-down management plans required to fully implement the CCP. Public involvement and compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) is to be incorporated into the process at all appropriate stages.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) provides NEPA compliance for the future management of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (GDSNWR) and the Nansemond National Wildlife Refuge (NNWR). Following the release of our final NEPA decision document (a Finding of No Significant Impact [FONSI] in the case of an environmental assessment) we will release the final CCP for the refuges. The CCP consists of the information found in the following sections of this document:

Chapter 1 Purpose of and Need for Action

This chapter discusses the purpose of and need for action; it provides background information on the refuges, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the associated ecosystems. It briefly describes the planning process followed. Goals were guided by establishing legislation mandates. Alternatives are shown addressing each goal. This chapter also describes issues, concerns, and opportunities identified during public scoping and issues not addressed in this EA.

Chapter 2 Affected Environment

This chapter describes the existing environment of each refuge. It describes the physical, biological, socio-economic and cultural resources that would be affected by the management actions of each alternative discussed in Chapter 3. The affected environment is the baseline for comparing the consequences of implementing each alternative.

Chapter 3 Alternatives

This chapter describes the alternatives for each refuge based on the goals discussed in Chapter 1. The Service's Proposed Action for each refuge is identified. Alternatives describe what management will occur over the next 15 years. A table at the end of the chapter summarizes the alternatives and compares the differences between them.

Chapter 4 Environmental Consequences

This chapter describes the environmental consequences of implementing each of the alternatives. It provides scientific and analytical bases for comparing the alternatives. It describes the probable consequences (impacts or effects) of each of the alternatives on the physical, biological, cultural, and socio-economic resources of the refuges.

Chapter 5 Consultation and Coordination with Others

This chapter describes the effort made by the Service to identify the issues, concerns, and opportunities to be described in this CCP/EA.

Appendices

The Appendices contain materials relevant to the decision being made, the affected environments of each of the refuges, and the analysis involved in determining environmental consequences.

In general, each section's text refers to Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge unless specific reference to Nansemond National Wildlife Refuge is made.

The final approved CCP will provide the vision and strategic direction for the Great Dismal Swamp and the Nansemond National Wildlife Refuges. When fully implemented, the CCP will help achieve the refuge's purpose, fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, maintain and/or restore the

biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuges, and meet other mandates. The CCP will also guide management decisions and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies to accomplish these ends. It will be supported by step-down management plans to provide additional details and to describe schedules for implementation. The CCP will be based on the principles of sound fish and wildlife management, available science, legal mandates, and other policies, guidelines, and planning documents. It will, above all else, ensure that **wildlife comes first on the refuges.**

We greatly appreciate the time and effort of the many citizens who contributed to the creation of the refuge and the development of the CCP. While this plan does not satisfy all the concerns expressed during the planning process, public involvement and participation substantially shaped the plan. Public involvement also greatly assisted the Service in determining how best to balance the important conservation of the natural resources found on the refuge while ensuring that environmental education and visitor use needs are met, as mandated by legislation.

For further information on our planning process, please refer to part 602 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual, National Wildlife Refuge System Planning, or go to the web at:

<http://policy.fws.gov/manual.html>